

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

TITLE:

**ROUTING SWITCHER WITH VARIABLE
INPUT/OUTPUT ARCHITECTURE**

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ROUTING SWITCHER WITH VARIABLE INPUT/OUTPUT ARCHITECTURE

Cross-Reference to Related Patent Applications

[001] This patent application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/264208, entitled "Routing Switcher With Variable Input/Output Architecture", filed January 24, 2001.

Field of the Invention

[002] The invention describes a variable input/output architecture for a routing switcher, whereby the number of input and output connectors can be varied.

Background of the Invention

[003] A routing switcher is a device that is used to direct signals from two or more input connectors/ports to one or more output connectors/ports through a manual or automated means. Routing switchers are used to manage a variety of signal types including analog audio, digital audio, analog video, and digital video.

[004] Conventional routing switchers have employed a "fixed" architecture, meaning that connectors may function as either input or output connectors, but not both. The routing switcher of the present invention uses a "variable" architecture that allows a user to change the number of input and output connectors/ports available on a single switcher so that the single switcher may be used for different applications. The selection of the required architecture may be made by manual or automated means, and is accomplished by selecting the function of certain connectors, usually a subset of the total number of signal connectors, to be either input or output connectors.

[005] When using manual means, the user manually defines the function of each connector as either input or output, using some hardware or software control. When using automated means, the user may specify the desired number of inputs and may be advised of the available number of outputs. Alternatively, the user may specify the desired number of outputs, and may be advised of the available number of outputs. The routing switcher control system uses this information to set the function of the appropriate connectors, usually at one time.

[006] A routing switcher is contained in a frame. The frame is a rack-mountable metal enclosure that contains all the input, output, signal switching, and control electronics. The input, output and control interface connectors are located on the rear panel of the frame. The number of input pins receiving input data and output pins transmitting output data ranges greatly, depending on the application for which the routing switcher is used. A routing switcher includes a switching matrix (or “crosspoint matrix”). The terms “switching matrix” and “crosspoint matrix” are often used interchangeably. The switching matrix size is commonly defined as $n \times m$ where n equals the number of input pins (or sources), and m equals the number of output pins (or destinations). Switching matrices can be square ($n = m$), or rectangular (where usually $n > m$). Larger switching matrices ($> 32 \times 32$) tend to be square. This is true because when an application requires the deployment of a large routing switcher, e.g. as a plant central routing switcher, the number of input connectors and the number of output connectors required usually is approximately equal.

[007] A plant central routing switcher is used to provide signal (e.g. video, audio) connectivity between all the equipment in the plant. The output signals of the equipment are connected to the input signal ports of the routing switcher; the output connectors of the

routing switcher are connected to the input signal ports of the equipment. The routing switcher control system is used to select and implement signal paths between the signal output of one piece of equipment and the signal input of another. For routing switchers with switching matrices sized 32 x 32 or smaller, the number of input ports and output ports that are needed is much more dependent on the requirements of a specific application than usually is the case with routing switchers containing larger switching matrices. For example, a tape duplication facility may require a large number of output ports (to feed the tape recorders), and a much smaller number of input ports. A monitoring system, on the contrary, may require the monitoring of a large number of input port signals, and a much smaller number of output ports transmitting output data to monitoring stations.

[008] Until now, manufacturers have produced a range of routing switchers of different sizes to satisfy diverse application requirements. Therefore, a routing switcher architecture that allows the user to switch the function of connectors so that they can function as either input or output connectors is needed. In this manner, a single routing switcher may be reconfigured to suit a variety of applications.

Brief Summary of the Invention

[009] The present invention includes of a routing switcher architecture that allows the user to switch the function of connectors so that they can function as either input or output connectors. Switches are used to connect a subset of input and output connectors to either an input pin or an output pin. These switches allow users to select the number of input connectors and output connectors available for their particular application. Each port is "bi-

directional,” as are the connectors terminating the ports. Bi-directional ports and connectors can function as both input and output ports/connectors, and a user selects their function for a particular application. A bi-directional port may be implemented by providing both an input port and an output port, and a switch to select the function required at any time. Alternatively, a bi-directional port may be implemented as a circuit element that incorporates input, output, and switching functions. An example of such a port suitable for serial video signals is discussed in the patent application for a “BI-DIRECTIONAL SERIAL VIDEO PORT,” application no. 09/063,952, filed on April 21, 1998, which is fully incorporated by reference herein. The present invention can be implemented using any form of bi-directional port, and in a variety of configurations/embodiments which may each allow for different numbers of input and output connectors.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[010] Fig. 1 shows a first embodiment of the routing switcher of the present invention.

[011] Fig. 2 shows a second embodiment of the routing switcher of the present invention.

[012] Fig. 3 shows a flowchart of an example process followed by the software to switch adjustable input/output connectors

Description of the Invention

[013] The physical size of a switching matrix is largely determined by the space required by the input and output connectors. For example, in a 1 rack unit enclosure, it is possible to fit approximately 34 BNC connectors onto the back panel. In the prior art, these connectors are

fixed as either inputs or outputs. This invention describes a means of changing the function (input to output, or vice versa) of some number of these connectors to implement a range of matrix sizes within a single platform.

[014] Fig. 1 shows a routing switcher 10 containing a switching matrix 12 with 8 inputs and 8 outputs. Input connectors 14, numbered 1-4, are connected directly to input pins and function as “fixed” input connectors in the sense that they function solely as input connectors. Output connectors 15, numbered 1-4, are connected directly to output pins and function as fixed outputs. Input/output connectors 16 that can be switched are connected to switches 17, which are labeled (S5-S8) in Fig. 1. The common poles of the switches 17 (S5-S8) are connected to input/output connectors 16, which serve as either input or output connectors depending on the position of the switches 17 (S5-S8). The function of each of the four connectors 16 (input or output) is determined by the number of input and output connectors selected by the user. The operator determines the number of input and output connectors via an interface, such as a GUI, and signals generated by control software adjust switches 17 (S5-S8) so that the number of connectors connected to input or output pins on the switching matrix 12 equals the number of input and outputs connector determined.

[015] The routing switcher depicted in Fig. 1 can be configured to operate in the following sizes by selecting various states of (S5-S8):

Number of Inputs	Number of Outputs
8	4
7	5
6	6
5	7
4	8

Table 1

[016] The routing switcher 20 in Fig. 2 is representative of a typical practical application of the invention. The switching matrix 22 is a switch containing thirty-two inputs pins and eighteen output pins. Sixteen of the input pins are connected to input connectors 24 that have been dedicated to performing purely an input function. Two of the eighteen output pins are connected to output connectors 25 that have been dedicated to performing purely an output function - transmitting output signals from the switching matrix 22. The remaining 16 input/output connectors 27 may be switched from performing an input function to performing an output function or vice versa via switches S1-S16. The states of switches S1-S16 determine whether a particular connector will function as an input connector or as an output connector. The states of switches S1-S16 are selected by the user, either manually or via a routing switcher control system, which is implemented with control software. One example of a process the software may follow in order to switch the operating mode of connectors is shown in Fig. 3.

[017] The system shown in Fig. 2 can be configured to support the matrix sizes shown in the table below:

Number of Inputs	Number of Outputs
32	2
31	3
30	4
29	5
28	6
27	7
26	8
25	9
24	10
23	11
22	12
21	13
20	14
19	15
18	16
17	17
16	18

Table 2

[018] Step 30 in the flowchart in Fig. 3 is the point at which the software retrieves the number of fixed inputs and fixed outputs from the switching matrix hardware. At step 32, the software receives a number entered by the user through an interface, such as a Graphical User Interface (GUI), indicating the number of input connectors desired. At step 34, the software determines whether the number of input connectors entered by the user is valid. The number

of input connectors entered may not exceed the sum of fixed input connectors and selectable input/output connectors available in the matrix configuration being used. If an invalid entry is made by the user, the software returns to step 32.

[019] At step 35, the total number of output connectors available to the user is calculated indirectly by the following formula: Available Output Connectors = Fixed Output Connectors + Selectable Input/Output Connectors – (Input Connectors Desired – Fixed Input Connectors).

At step 36, the number of Available Output Connectors and Desired Input Connectors is displayed. At step 37, some input/output connectors are switched to an input mode such that the number of connectors operating in an input mode equals the number of input connectors entered by the user at stage 32. At stage 38, some input/output connectors are switched to an output mode such that the number of connectors operating in an output mode equals the number of output connectors available to the user.

[020] It will be clear to one practiced in the art that many variations are possible in such a control system. For example, step 35 could be omitted by pre-programming the numbers of each type of connector, or by allowing the user to select from a number of pre-determined connector configurations, or by requiring the user to enter the number of each type of connector. As another example, the user could be asked to enter the desired number of outputs, and be advised of the available number of inputs. Alternatively, the user could be allowed to select from a number of pre-determined input/output configurations. All such variations and implementations are included in the present invention.

[021] The invention enables a single routing switcher to replace a variety of routing switchers of varying sizes. The fact that the present invention allows a single routing switcher

to replace multiple routing switchers of different sizes increases manufacturing scale, i.e. in order to satisfy customer needs, a greater quantity of a single routing switcher configuration can be manufactured instead of smaller quantities of multiple routing switchers. This can reduce the amount of inventory carried by both manufacturers and distributors during the manufacturing and distribution processes. As Table 2 illustrates, the number of input and output connectors can be chosen very precisely for the routing switcher of the present invention – the number of input and output connectors can be varied by one within a range of possibilities to satisfy the requirements of different applications. Alternative implementations may employ a greater granularity, for example switching connectors in pairs rather than individually.

[022] With conventional designs, users who must select routing switchers to meet specific requirements cannot precisely choose the number of input and output connectors that they want to use – they must use an off-the-shelf product that most closely mimics the input/output connector configuration they desire.

[023] There exist many alternative embodiments of the present invention and alternative ways to implement the present invention, many of which may not be described explicitly herein but are covered by the actual purview of the claims.

[024] The "switches" of the present invention that change the function of a given connector from one of receiving signals (input connector) to one of transmitting signals (output connector) or vice versa may be implemented as an electronic device that is not a switch which changes state in order to change the function of connectors. This implementation of the invention does not require a separate physical switch or electronic crosspoint. Furthermore,

the "Bi-Directional Serial Video Port" application incorporated by reference herein embodies an approach that may be used to allow the present invention to transmit video signals.

FIG. 10 is a block diagram of a video port circuit.